Teaching reading effectively in today’s schools is arguably as much science as it is art. To meet the literacy needs of all students, teachers begin their work with knowledge as to how reading and writing develop based on evidence-based research and the new English Language Arts Common Core Standards. Effective literacy teachers are able to assess student progress quickly and efficiently, and then provide effective literacy instruction to meet their needs. All of this and more must be delivered in real time, with real children, in real classroom situations.

**New to This Edition**

*Strategies for Reading Assessment and Instruction in an Era of Common Core Standards* has gained popularity as a quick and effective reference tool for teachers of reading analogous to the *Physicians’ Desk Reference* that many doctors use when treating patients. Our fifth edition of *Strategies for Reading Assessment and Instruction in an Era of Common Core Standards* is a “point-of-teaching” resource that offers teachers the following new and updated content:

- Common Core State Standards in the English Language Arts (K–5) clearly aligned to assessment and teaching strategies in our newly designed chapters
- **New If-Then Strategy Guides**, our popular and time-saving charts connecting student assessment data to appropriate teaching strategies (e.g., *if* students need to learn X, *then* these are the teaching strategies I could use to help them)
- New chapters containing the most up-to-date information about implementing a Response to Intervention (RTI) model to differentiated instruction in your classroom according to students’ needs
- Updated **Background Briefings** for Teachers on important literacy research and trends in such areas as oral language development, phonemic awareness, concepts about print, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, new literacies, and fluency
- New chapters on assessing and teaching literature and information texts specifically referenced to the Common Core State Standards
- New suggestions for teaching English language learners and learners with special needs, integrated in Chapters 3 through 12

**Resources Behind This Edition**

The scholarly and practical resources behind the strategies in this book are many. We mined the contents of this book from our direct experiences as project designers on federally and state-funded reading reform projects, most especially in high-poverty schools associated with the Reading First and Striving Readers projects funded by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE); from practices shared by incredibly talented literacy coaches in the Dallas, Memphis, Ogden, Granite, Louisville, Oldham County Schools (KY), and San Juan school districts, to name just a few; from ideas published in *The Reading Teacher* (International Reading Association) during our respective tenures as editors of that journal; and from our own direct experiences in the classroom. For contemporary trends in assessment, we drew on research reported in literacy professional and research journals and books along with these landmark reports: the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000), Developing...
Literacy in Second-Language Learners; Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (2006); The National Early Literacy Panel (2008); What Works Clearinghouse; and a variety of Institute of Education Sciences Practice Guides.

For the Practicing Educator

Classroom reading teachers will also discover that Strategies for Reading Assessment and Instruction in an Era of Common Core Standards provides an extensive and recently updated selection of evidence-based instructional practices and assessment tools that (1) inform instruction, (2) meet the needs of individual learners, (3) specifically meet the challenges of the new English Language Arts (K–5) Common Core State Standards, and (4) develop an understanding of the essentials of evidence-based reading instruction in a RTI/multitiered systems of support (MTSS) instructional environment. Because of our emphasis on an RTI/MTSS models for meeting student needs, those who teach in special education resource rooms, Title 1 reading programs, and university reading clinics will find that this fifth edition is particularly useful for teaching groups of students with diverse and special needs.

Advantages for Preservice Teachers

For preservice teachers, this fifth edition of Strategies for Reading Assessment and Instruction in an Era of Common Core Standards offers a practical resource for understanding past and present issues in reading instruction and assessment. It also provides an introduction to assessment purposes, types, and evidence, as well as access to information about RTI instructional models and practices. Teachers in training will also find the updated, ready-to-use instructional strategies useful in teacher education practicum experiences, classroom observations, clinical experiences, and in student teaching.

Using this Edition as a Tool for Professional Development Workshops

Codistributed and published with the endorsement of the International Reading Association (IRA), Strategies for Reading Assessment and Instruction in an Era of Common Core Standards is a proven tool for ongoing professional development in this age of evidence-based reading assessment and instruction. Widely used in such states as Ohio, Florida, and Pennsylvania as an approved in-service reference, this book contains the latest in research on assessment purposes, types, and tools, along with new information about RTI/MTSS models of classroom instruction for more effectively meeting the needs of students within the regular education classroom setting. In addition, the updated and newly revised Chapters 1, 2, and 9 through 12 provide practicing teachers access to highly effective, reliable, valid, and classroom-proven assessments and teaching strategies that address the higher demands of the ELACCS (K–5), and presenting this information in an easy-to-use format that makes the implementation of effective reading assessment and appropriately selected instruction strategies in the classroom quick and easy. In fact, each of the previous four editions of Strategies for Reading Assessment and Instruction in an Era of Common Core Standards has been used as the primary resource in literally thousands of professional development study groups, professional learning communities (PLCs), and workshop sessions on evidence-based, effective, and standards-based reading instruction across the United States.
Supplements for Instructors

Instructor’s Resource Manual and Test Bank

For each chapter, the Instructor’s Resource Manual features a Chapter Overview; Learning Objectives; Key Terms; suggestions for Before, During, and After Reading; and a list of suggested activities. The Test Bank includes a combination of multiple-choice and essay questions. The Instructor’s Resource Manual and Test Bank can be downloaded from the Instructor Resource Center at www.pearsonhighered.com/irc.

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Thank you for choosing to purchase and use this fifth edition of Strategies for Reading Assessment and Instruction in an Era of Common Core Standards. We know from long experience and many thousands of comments from previous readers that it will assist you in your efforts to develop effective, efficient reading assessment and instruction plans. Please send us your comments and observations about whether we have achieved our aim.

Best wishes as you work to help every child become a successful reader and realize his or her full potential as an individual.

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Ms. Spears, a first-year literacy teacher, felt more than a bit unsure of herself. This was especially true when it came to how literacy assessment fit in with a new emphasis on implementing the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts (K–12) and the district’s newly implemented Response to Intervention (RTI) model to differentiate instruction based on data collection and analysis. She had many questions about where to begin and how. This was only exacerbated when a new student, Jason, transferred into her classroom in mid-September from a distant state.

Jason’s mother was not given access to his cumulative records from the previous school district, so Ms. Spears had nothing to go on in terms of understanding Jason’s current or past literacy instructional needs or his appropriate placement into small-group literacy instruction in the class. Jason’s mom also informed the principal that Jason had struggled previously in school, especially in reading. With that information in mind, Ms. Spears decided that she would need to pull together a set of assessments to better understand Jason’s reading ability. But which assessments would she use? Why? What would they assess? It seemed that she had more questions than answers.

As noted in our Introduction, teachers are asked to grapple in new ways with ensuring that every child becomes fully literate. This means addressing the needs of struggling learners as well as those developing at a typical or even an accelerated pace. Every classroom has this range of learners. Of special interest to all of us is how we address reading achievement gaps.

The first challenge we noted in the Introduction has to do with the persistent reading achievement gap among students in specific ethnic and cultural groups, as well as children living in poverty or near-poverty circumstances. The second achievement gap has resulted from our nation’s deteriorating performance in literacy as compared to 34 other highly developed world nations and economies. Frankly, if we address the first achievement gap effectively, then the other gap related to our place in the world will follow. So where do we start?

The fundamentals—it seems to us, anyway—may be summed up in the answers to two questions that we refer to as the how and what questions:

• What must children know and be able to do to become proficient readers?
• How can teachers quickly and efficiently assess where students are in their reading development and, thus, plan effective instruction to meet their needs?
What Should Be Assessed in Reading

The English Language Arts (K–12) Common Core Standards

The first source for determining the benchmark skills to be assessed at each grade level is the English Language Arts (K–12) Common Core Standards (ELACCS) (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). These were established as part of the Common Core State Standards Initiative with the goal that all students are college and career ready in literacy by the end of high school (Pearson, 2013; Reutzel, 2013; Shanahan, 2013). A complete copy can be obtained free online at www.corestandards.org.

The ELACCS are organized into two major sections: K–5 and 6–12. In this book, we concern ourselves primarily with the K–5 standards. There are four strands arranged by grade level: (1) reading, (2) writing, (3) speaking and listening, and (4) language.

Within the reading strand there are three substrands: (1) literature, (2) informational text, and (3) foundational skills. In addition, there are four anchor standards for reading literature and informational texts substrands: (1) key ideas and details, (2) craft and structure, (3) integration of knowledge and ideas, and (4) range of reading and levels of text complexity.

Evidence-Based Reading Skills

Our second source for determining the essential skills to be assessed at each grade level comes from decades of evidence-based research. It stands to reason that if we understand the reading skills students typically learn and in what order, then we can set out to find the best research-proven strategies for assessing growth in each.

In recent decades, an enormous amount of high-quality, evidence-based research has been reported that gives us rich insights into the developmental milestones human beings experience as they become literate. In reading education, we often refer to the elements of this research collectively as the big five:

1. **Phonological and phonemic awareness**: This involves the conceptual understanding that spoken language can be broken down into smaller units such as sentences, phrases, words, syllables, onsets, rimes, and phonemes (sounds) (e.g., Adams, 2001; Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000).

2. **Phonics**: This is a teaching method that relates spoken sounds to written symbols in systematic and predictable ways (letter–sound relationships) and shows readers how this knowledge can be used to decode words in print (Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Stahl, 2006).

3. **Vocabulary**: Reading comprehension and writing composition are dependent on word knowledge (Kame‘enui & Baumann, 2012). In this area of research, we focus on strategies for building both oral vocabulary and word knowledge for reading and writing.

4. **Comprehension**: The National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) described reading comprehension as “a complex process . . . [that uses] intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader. . . . The content of meaning is influenced by the text and by the reader’s prior knowledge and experience that are brought to bear on it” (pp. 4–5).
5. **Fluency**: This involves several factors: accurate, effortless, and automatic word identification; age- or grade-level-appropriate reading speed or rate; suitable use of expression (volume, pitch, juncture, and stress); correct text phrasing or “chunking”; and simultaneous comprehension of what is read (Reutzel & Cooter, 2015).

Of course, there are other areas of related research, such as student engagement and motivation, classroom environments and learning routines, English learners (EL), new literacies/technology, and family involvement, all of which impact student learning. However, much of the key research addressed in this book and by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) relates to assessing the evidence-based essentials of reading instruction.

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**How Do We Assess Students’ Reading Development?**

**Principles of Classroom Reading Assessment**

We have developed several principles of classroom reading assessment to help guide your decision making. Over several decades of practice we have learned that abiding by these principles helps teachers make focused, systematic, and purposeful decisions in their teaching that ultimately benefit children as they learn to read.

**Principle 1: The Teacher’s Goal Is to Find Out What Children Can Do**

In reviewing our reading road map built from the ELACCS, we see that the development of reading follows a clear path with defined markers along the way. Your job as a teacher is to locate where each child is in his or her development so you can offer appropriate instruction to continue growth and fill any learning gaps. This is done by carefully charting what children can do from your reading assessments, rather than what they cannot do. This begins with confirming early reading benchmark skills children have mastered and moving systematically through your assessments toward the more complex skills. This will tell you where each child is in his or her reading development and what gaps exist; then you can plan instruction targeting what should come next.

**Principle 2: Assessment Informs Instruction**

There has been a kind of “the chicken or the egg” debate in past years about which comes first, teaching or assessment. Principle 1 resolves that debate for us; effective teaching cannot possibly begin until we first discover where children are in their reading development. To do otherwise results in random acts of teaching. Therefore, gathering assessment information that shows us what a student can do, charting those data using the reading road map based on the ELACCS, and then seeing which skills come next in the student’s development helps us know the appropriate next steps for students in their reading development. This process avoids wasting class time teaching reading skills students already own or that are too advanced and beyond their grasp at this time.

**Principle 3: Be Prepared: Gather Your Assessment Tools in Advance**

If you decided to repaint your living room, you would decide on the color you want use and then go to the store and purchase all the necessary supplies before starting the job: a how-to book (a road map for painting), paint, brushes, rollers, ladder, drop cloth, and so forth. With your tools assembled you could begin work. In assessing reading development, we also have some essential tools of the trade: the end-of-year benchmark skills, class profiling documents (Reutzel & Cooter, 2008) to record students’ strengths and needs, leveled books in
the language of instruction (i.e., English and/or Spanish in many classrooms), a recorder for student readings, carefully prepared observation checklists, and progress-monitoring assessments like those presented later in this book.

**Principle 4: Analyze Students’ Assessment Results Using If-Then Thinking**

One of the more complex tasks for teachers is analyzing reading assessment data gathered for each student. Doing this well helps you form needs-based groups for instruction and choose appropriate teaching strategies. Put another way, we sometimes get to be pretty good at gathering assessment evidence, but then we have difficulty analyzing our findings and converting them into powerful classroom action plans.

Analysis involves what we call *if-then thinking.* The basic philosophy goes something like this: If you know that a child is able to do X in reading, then he or she is now ready to learn Y. Put another way, if you know the highest level reading skills from your ELACCSS road map that students can alone (their independent reading levels, see Principles 1 and 2), then you can accurately predict which reading skill(s) they should learn next with your assistance. In each chapter, we provide you with an “If-Then Chart” located between the sections on assessment and teaching strategies (for example, see Table 1.1 later in the chapter).

**Principle 5: Document Students’ Growth in Reading Over Time**

Reading assessment is not just a one-shot activity done at the beginning of the year, but an ongoing and integral part of teaching and learning. Indeed, assessment and good teaching are virtually seamless. It is critical that we carry a veritable arsenal of assessment ideas in our teaching battery for each specific purpose. In the next section, we explain the four primary purposes of reading assessment for documenting student learning over time.

**The Four Purposes of Reading Assessment**

There are four major assessment purposes: (1) screening assessment, (2) diagnostic assessment, (3) progress-monitoring assessment, and (4) outcomes assessment. Screening assessments are administered to all students. They are given to provide a portrait of where students are in their reading development, as well as any preexisting deficits that may put them at risk for making inadequate progress. In short, screening tests help you know to what degree students have acquired the previous grade-level reading skills and to determine whether any students are at risk for making adequate progress in their new grade level.

Screening assessment data include scores from the previous year or grade level and assessments given at the beginning of the new school year. Because all students are assessed, these must be both efficient (quick to administer and score) and general (not exhaustive or comprehensive). Examples of screening tests are DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) test or the Aimsweb computer-based reading assessment.

Screening tests merely sample student knowledge, ability, and skills. For example, if a student reads slowly or inaccurately on the DIBELS ORF, we only know that the student reads inaccurately and slowly; we do not know why this is the case. If we want to troubleshoot the observed disfluent oral reading of a student for planning targeted instruction, other assessments will be necessary to diagnose where the student is experiencing difficulty. However, if a student performs as expected according to grade-level benchmarks, then there is no need for additional assessment beyond the usual progress monitoring (discussed later).

If some students perform below expectations on literacy screening assessments, this may signal the need for an additional diagnostic assessment to troubleshoot or pinpoint the source of the problem. The purpose of diagnostic assessments is to help teachers identify specific reading problems so they can plan appropriate instructional interventions. Diagnostic
assessments can be commercially produced formal tests or informal teacher-produced tasks to determine students’ abilities to use reading skills or strategies previously taught.

During the school year, all student progress in reading should be consistently monitored to determine whether the instruction provided is effective with regard to end-of-year benchmark skills. To accomplish this aim, teachers use assessments called progress-monitoring or benchmark assessments. To effectively use progress-monitoring/benchmark assessments, teachers assess student progress at least three times during the school year at predetermined intervals. Students who are behind end-of-year benchmark or proficiency expectations are often monitored one or more times per week (McCook, 2007) to see if the instruction provided is working. If progress monitoring shows acceptable literacy growth for at-risk learners, then one can conclude that the literacy instruction in use is effective and should be continued. Conversely, if progress-monitoring assessments indicate little or no student progress, then additional literacy instructional intervention may be indicated.

At or near the end of the school year, state and federal mandates often require that outcome assessments be used to determine the overall effectiveness of the literacy program for all students. Typically, outcome assessments are one of two types: (1) norm-referenced tests (NRT), in which students’ literacy progress is compared with other students nationally, or (2) criterion-referenced tests (CRT), in which students’ progress is judged against established literacy benchmarks or standards.

### Types of Reading Assessments Found in This Book

The types of reading assessments found in this book are primarily informal and criterion-based. To put that into a little more context, there are seven types of reading assessments commonly encountered in the experiences of classroom teachers: (1) formative, (2) summative, (3) criterion-referenced, (4) norm-referenced, (5) formal, (6) informal, and (7) curriculum-based measures (CBMs). In this section, we briefly summarize four of these types of assessments: (1) formative, (2) summative, (3) criterion-referenced, and (4) norm-referenced. From there, we discuss the characteristics of high-quality reading assessments. Let’s begin with formative assessments because they are the mainstay of day-to-day teaching and most of what we present in this book.

### Formative Reading Assessments

The goal of formative assessments is to help teachers identify what students have learned during and after instruction and to decide who may need assistance and with which strategies and skills (McIntyre, Hulan, & Layne, 2011). Formative assessments can also provide diagnostic feedback about where a process, strategy, or concept understanding is working properly for a student or where there may be a breakdown that needs to be addressed with future instruction and guided practice (Lipson & Wixson, 2013). These are ongoing assessments that provide a framework for consistently monitoring student progress toward attaining goals, objectives, or benchmark Common Core State Standards or other specific benchmark objectives (e.g., “The learner will be able to orally read a 100-word passage with 95% accuracy in one minute in third-grade nonfiction texts”) (Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2012).

Formative assessments are mostly designed and used by teachers. The results of formative assessment inform both the teacher and student about progress toward a known objective or benchmark standard. For the student, formative assessments provide feedback about accuracy, process, and effort. For the teacher, formative assessments provide feedback about lesson effectiveness, student engagement, and student responses to instruction. Formative assessments can also provide students with opportunities for peer or self-assessment (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2013).
Formative assessments yield results that are most useful in providing teachers with feedback about lesson planning, student grouping or placement, materials selection, guided and independent practice activities, and classroom environmental design modifications needed to support progress in reading and literacy. In short, formative assessments are most useful for revising, modifying, differentiating, and adjusting instruction and practice to meet student needs (Stahl & McKenna, 2013).

**Summative Reading Assessments**

Assessments found in this book can often be used as summative assessments, which are used after the fact (post-teaching) to make decisions about the effectiveness of the teaching strategies used. More formal summative assessments, such as high-stakes state reading tests, are often used to determine student growth in reading and make sweeping decisions about state initiatives, reading programs, and interventions, or to provide evidence for public accountability (Lipson & Wixson, 2013).

An examination of the root of the word, *sum*, clarifies the purpose of summative assessment. Stahl and McKenna (2013) use a cooking analogy to contrast the formative and summative assessment types: When the cook tastes the soup to see if other ingredients are needed, that’s formative; when the guest tastes the soup at the dinner table, that’s summative.

**Criterion-Referenced Reading Assessments**

Many of the assessments used in this book are also considered criterion-referenced reading assessments, also known as *criterion-referenced tests* (CRTs). With CRTs, student scores are referenced against specific criteria such as reading curriculum goals, lesson objectives, or benchmark standards. We learn from CRTs the degree to which students have learned specific skills, strategies, or concepts. Let's look at a couple of examples.

Imagine you have a first-grade student who must learn to quickly and accurately recognize all 26 letters of the alphabet, both upper- and lowercase letters. If the mastery criterion is set at 100% recognition, which only makes sense, then students who achieve this objective have reached mastery. A similar benchmark criterion may be that students are able to read grade-level texts with 80% comprehension as measured by correct answers to comprehension questions. Thus, a student who answers 90% of the questions correctly has met, or actually exceeded, the mastery criterion.

In summary, criterion-referenced reading assessment scores represent the degree to which mastery of a well-defined curriculum goal, lesson objective, or attainment of a standard has been met. Criterion-referenced reading assessment scores can also reflect how well a student is doing in meeting moving benchmarks over time (e.g., from grade to grade) and with a variety of tasks (e.g., text difficulty or complexity). In either case, the criterion referenced here is used to determine whether a student has met a set goal for learning a specific benchmark skill.

**Norm-Referenced Reading Assessments**

Criterion-referenced assessments in reading differ significantly from norm-referenced reading assessments, sometimes referred to as *norm-referenced tests* (NRTs). These compare an individual student’s test scores to another group of students who took the same test (Pearce & Verlann, 2012; Rathvon, 2004). Some of the assessment strategies presented in this book are norm-referenced (e.g., the words correct per minute test found in Chapter 8).

Producers of commercial NRTs define the characteristics of a normative group (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomics) against which others will be compared, as well as the context of test administration by which comparisons are to be made (state, national, international). This process often involves the use of complex and rather expensive population research processes such as random sampling and statistical analyses.
By first administering the assessment to a randomly selected population of students, the test makers create what is called a normative or representative group that has within it the complex set of population characteristics found in the larger group from which the random sample was taken. Doing so creates a frame of reference against which your student or class of students can be compared, hence the term norm-referenced. As shown in Figure 1.1, student performance can be compared to the normal or average performance of the original normative group according to grade level, age, gender, and so forth. The normal or bell curve provides different ways of talking about the data obtained.

For example, many NRTs provide grade-level equivalents (GLE), means (arithmetic average), standard deviations (SD) from the mean score, percentiles (the normal curve sliced into 100 equal pieces), or stanines (the normal curve sliced into 9 equal pieces). Student scores can then be compared to scores of the normative group (e.g., second grade students nationally). The resultant student scores could be interpreted or compared against the norms for the group. Let’s say a student in your second-grade class at the end of the year receives a 2.7 grade-level equivalent score (translates to the equivalent performance of most second graders in their seventh month of instruction). This means that compared to the normative group of second graders nationally at the end of the school year (2.9 or second grade, ninth month), your student reads about 2 months behind the average second grade student nationally.

Norm-referenced reading assessments accurately compare whether your particular student or group of students scores significantly above, below, or at the average compared to the normative group. It should be noted that most high-stakes state tests are not considered NRTs because they do not compare student performance to other students nationally. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) is one example of a nationally validated
norm-referenced test used in many school districts that wish to make reliable comparisons of their students’ performance across state boundaries. The reading subtest scores from the ITBS, for example, can be used to compare students’ reading scores locally to other students nationally.

Characteristics of High-Quality Reading Assessments

There are a number of characteristics shared by high-quality reading assessments. Although published, standardized, norm- or criterion-referenced reading assessments are more likely to provide evidence of these characteristics for end users, even those assessments developed informally and locally should furnish evidence of these same characteristics if the assessments are going to be used to make decisions about student placements or the reading instruction offered to students. The amount and quality of evidence provided about these characteristics of high-quality assessments ought to be the basis on which educators make informed decisions about reading assessment selection. The two most important characteristics of high-quality reading assessments are reliability and validity.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the trustworthiness or dependability of results obtained from assessment administrations given to the same set of students under similar circumstances. The more reliable an assessment is, the more confidence we can have that the results obtained from one administration of the assessment to another will remain stable or consistent. In other words, no educator would want to make decisions about student placements or instruction based on assessment results that vary wildly from one assessment occasion to another. A high-quality reading assessment must provide evidence of reliability.

Validity

Validity refers to the degree to which an assessment actually measures what it is claiming to measure. For example, if we claim to measure reading ability, does the assessment we have chosen actually measure a student’s ability to read? This means that we must clearly define what we mean when we say a student can read. Do we mean that students can read increasingly difficult texts? Or, do we mean that a student has mastered specific reading subskills such as reading contractions, marking the number of syllables in words, or finding answers to detail questions in a 100-word passage? Reading assessment validity is judged by the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of the interpretations made about the assessment results obtained by those who use the assessment, not on the assessment itself (Afflerbach, 2012; Lipson & Wixson, 2013).

Validity and Reliability in the Real World

Many educators are sometimes a little confused about the reliability and validity of high-quality assessments (McKenna & Stahl, 2009). Perhaps an example drawn from common life experiences may illustrate how these two characteristics work in daily life and would help to clarify any potential confusion.

Imagine that you are shopping for designer jeans. As you shop, you regularly see Levi-Strauss jeans on display. Although these jeans are known worldwide for consistent
quality construction and durability (reliability), they are hardly considered “designer”
jeans. In other words, although Levi jeans are consistently made to high-quality stan-
dards, they do not meet the standards of design and fashion associated with the concept
of designer jeans. A better example of designer jeans might be Ralph Lauren, because
of the optional cut, fit, and decorative trim around pockets and seams, as well as the
reputed consistent high quality. It is important to note here that reliability (consistent
high standards for manufacturing) is a necessary but insufficient precondition to estab-
lish validity (the cache of designer labels). In other words, jeans, whatever their label,
must be consistently constructed with high-quality materials and methods, but doing so
does not qualify them as designer jeans without the other characteristics associated with
the idea of designer jeans also being present. It is possible for Levi jeans to be a reliable
jean but not a valid jean that meets the definition of designer jeans. Similarly, a reliable
assessment may not be a valid assessment, but a valid assessment should always be a
reliable assessment.

Assessments that produce inconsistent results (poor reliability) cannot possibly provide
adequate validity evidence. Conversely, providing adequate reliability evidence does not
mean that an assessment is measuring the right things or being used in appropriate ways to
draw valid conclusions from the scores obtained. The highest quality assessments provide
appropriate reliability evidence for the grade and age levels to be assessed. In addition, high-
quality assessments provide evidence that the assessment is measuring the outcomes and
behaviors deemed necessary and important. For example, if a group of students’ reading
ability is to be assessed, then assessing these students’ ability to accurately and fluently
reading progressively more difficult texts with adequate comprehension would be expected.
On the other hand, if we wanted to know whether students have learned particular skills,
strategies, or concepts to be taught in a reading program or have attained specific objectives
or benchmark standards, then we may ask students to perform very particular tasks, such
as dividing a word into syllables, writing the contracted form of a word, or reading a group
of high-frequency sight words within a specified time limit with 95% accuracy. In short,
educators should be the first ones to ask this question when selecting a new assessment:
What is the reliability and validity evidence provided for using the scores obtained from
administering this particular assessment?

Assessing the Reading Process Components

Reading assessment is based on reading theories. Theory, simply put, is an explanation of
a complex behavior. Well-specified theories are described in simplest terms. Often, in order
to simplify a theory, a visual model is used to represent how the theory works. This is also
ture of reading assessment. Reading assessment is based on a theory about how humans go
about the task of learning to read. Models of reading assessment are as abundant and varied
as are the theories and models of how to teach children to read. In fact, the sixth edition of
the Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading (Alvermann, Unrau, & Ruddell, 2013) is
a book of over 1,300 pages!

Without a model of reading assessment that is based in reading theories and pro-
cesses, teachers and reading specialists have no way of making sense of the observations
they make about children’s reading behaviors when using a variety of assessment tools. A
high-quality model of reading assessment should accomplish two important tasks. First,
it should specify a process for assessing students’ reading development based in strong
reading theories. Second, it should inform teachers and specialists about which assess-
ments are needed for each student to make reading assessment as effective and efficient
as possible.
In this book we have decided to reduce the plethora of reading theories to just two reading assessment theories that seem to be the most practical for the work of classroom teachers. These two theories of reading assessment are: (1) a components-based model (Rathvon, 2004) and (2) a standards-based model (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2013; Morrow, Wixson, & Shanahan, 2013). The components-based model best corresponds to addressing reading needs. The standards-based model best corresponds with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). We begin with a discussion of the components-based model of reading assessment.

A Component-Based Model of Reading Assessment

A component-based reading assessment model is drawn from reading theories that specify both the components and how these components develop over time. Rathvon (2004) suggests there are several reading-related abilities that predict success or struggle for students when learning to read. These are:

- Memory and attention
- Oral language development
- Phonological processes
- Orthographic (spelling) processes
- Concepts about print
- Alphabetic knowledge
- Word reading
- Contextual reading
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension

To this list of reading-related components, we add the now well-accepted elements of reading motivation and student engagement. This list of reading components can be reduced into a simple four-component assessment model of reading based on sociocognitive theories of the reading process. These four major assessment components are: (1) decoding, (2) comprehension, (3) cognitive processes, and (4) motivation. In Figure 1.2 we display the component-based model of reading assessment.

In a component-based model of reading assessment, students learn to read by developing four parallel reading component processes: (1) decoding, (2) language, (3) cognitive processing, and (4) motivation or engagement to reach the ultimate goal of reading comprehension. Within the decoding component, development is portrayed sequentially, with the acquisition of one decoding subcomponent leading directly to the acquisition of the next. On the other hand, within the language, cognitive processing, and motivational components, subcomponents work together simultaneously rather than sequentially.

A closer inspection of the decoding component in the model reveals that decoding begins with: (1) concepts about print and (2) phonological processes. The acquisition of these two subcomponents predicts the acquisition of the alphabetic principle, the concept that spoken sounds and written symbols are linked to one another in systematic ways. Acquisition of the alphabetic principle leads to the development of orthographic or spelling knowledge. Spelling knowledge is composed of two interlocking pieces, phonological recoding (putting sound to symbol) of within-word phonic spelling patterns and recognition of whole high-frequency or high-interest words by sight without phonological recoding. Learning to recognize spelling patterns and words leads to automatic word recognition in isolation, and that in turn leads to the development of fluent contextual reading. The ability to decode or recognize words fluently in context supports the ability to comprehend what one reads.
In the language component shown in the model, the number of word meanings known, an understanding of how sentences are structured, and comprehending how units of spoken text are organized or structured lead to language comprehension. Language comprehension provides the foundational structures for supporting later reading comprehension, as shown in the model.

In the cognitive processing component of the model, the subcomponents of attention, memory, and strategy selection/use combine in the mind of the reader to provide the necessary cognitive strategies to facilitate the active mental process of reading comprehension. In the model’s motivational component, the subcomponents of social interaction, student choice and reader purpose, the literacy task to be accomplished, access to print (either traditional
or digital), and the emotional elements of interest and attitude combine to motivate readers to engage in reading. Without reading engagement, reading comprehension is not possible.

The component-based assessment model of reading suggests that each and every component in the model is necessary for the reader to succeed in comprehending a printed message. For the teacher or reading specialist, this implies that the problems students sometimes encounter in learning to read are almost always related to the malfunctioning or complete absence of one or more of the components or subcomponents in the model. Just like a computer that is absent one or more of its components doesn’t function properly, the component-based model of reading predicts that students who are missing or have poorly developed or incomplete reading components will struggle with learning to read well. The component-based model of reading assessment helps to guide the teacher or reading specialist to systematically explore or examine the presence and status of each component or subcomponent to diagnose and design specific interventions to assist struggling readers in an efficient and effective way. After describing a standards-based model of reading assessment, we will then discuss how one uses this model in an RTI setting to determine an efficient assessment plan to inform instruction and intervention planning to assist struggling readers.

A Standards-Based Model of Reading Assessment

A standards-based reading assessment model is supported by curriculum theories that specify both the standards and the focus of those standards in driving the development of a reading instructional curriculum. These specify the range and sequence of reading skills to be taught. Standards-based reading assessment models integrate features of curriculum design that are sequenced to inform the design and accomplishment of specified curriculum objectives like those found earlier in our reading road map. Researchers (e.g., McLaughlin & Overturf, 2013; Morrow, Wixson, & Shanahan, 2013) provide helpful overviews of the English Language Arts (K–12) Common Core Standards and how these standards are organized to achieve the desired objective of college- and career-ready students. In the reading strand, the anchor standards of key ideas and details, craft and structure, integration of knowledge and ideas, and text range and complexity are the same for literature and informational texts.

In the reading foundations skills substrand, the anchor standards include print concepts, phonological awareness, word recognition, phonics and spelling, and reading fluency. In the ELACCS writing strand, the anchor standards include types and purpose of text production, production and distribution of texts, research to build knowledge to support the production of text, and the range and complexity of texts to be produced. In the ELACCS listening and speaking strand, the anchor standards of social collaboration/conversation, comprehension, and presentation skills are expected. Finally, in the language strand of the ELACCS, the anchor standards of conventions of standard English, knowledge of language, and vocabulary provide the linguistic well from which the reading, writing, listening, and speaking draw. In Figure 1.3 we display a standards-based model of reading assessment using the ELACCS as the foundation.

In a standards-based model of reading assessment, standards are designed to help students read, write, listen to, and speak standard English using expected conventions, structures, and word meanings as they become college and career ready. Within the ELACCS reading standard, there is an expectation that students will initially learn foundational reading skills that will facilitate their later ability to read a range of increasingly complex and challenging literary and informational texts.

The standards-based model of reading assessment suggests that the mastery of each standard in the model is necessary for the student to achieve the goal of being college or career ready. The model helps guide the teacher or reading specialist to systematically examine the student’s progress toward mastery of each standard to diagnose and intervene to assist developing language learners.
Translating Assessment Data into Effective Instruction: An RTI Perspective

In this chapter we have seen the importance of beginning the work of teaching and learning with a clear set of end-of-year benchmark skills defining the literacy learning milestones. The English Language Arts (K–12) Common Core Standards serve us well to that end, especially...
**TABLE 1.1 Connecting Assessment Data to Teaching: An If-Then Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If the student is ready to learn</th>
<th>Read Environmental Print</th>
<th>Language Experience Approach</th>
<th>Voice Point</th>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Masking Highlight</th>
<th>Context Transfer</th>
<th>Error Detect</th>
<th>Verbal Punctuation</th>
<th>Shared Reading</th>
<th>Manipulative Letters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book handling</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directionality</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print carries message</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice–print matching</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept of word/letter</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order—letters/words</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic response to environmental print</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one strategy to unlock unknown words</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: + Excellent strategy  
* Adaptable strategy  
- Unsuitable strategy
when they are enhanced with other essential skills and strategies identified through evidence-based research. This gives us the precise reading road map we need to begin our work.

With our road map in hand, student assessment strategies can be selected for each of the end-of-year benchmark skills. These must, again, be assessment strategies we know from research to be reliable and valid indicators to help us understand how to map individual student accomplishments and needs. The next step is to use our assessment data to select proven instructional strategies for teaching the end-of-year benchmark reading skills needed by our students.

One of the unique features of this book is the If-Then Chart in each of the content chapters, beginning in Section 2, that links assessment outcomes to the selection of particular teaching or intervention strategies, programs, or procedures. For an example, see Table 1.1.

These If-Then Charts are designed to help teachers and specialists clearly see the connections between the results of administering specific reading assessments and the selection and use of specific instructional or intervention strategies. For example, if the results of a concepts about print reading assessment indicate that students don’t know the concept of word, then the chart would direct the teacher to begin by using a variety of instructional strategies, such as pointing, masking, highlighting, or framing, to help students focus attention on the unit of text called a word, which is signaled by a group of symbols close together separated by two white spaces on either side.

Response to Intervention: Differentiating Instruction to Meet Student Needs

Now that we have a reading road map via the English Language Arts (K–12) Common Core Standards and evidence-based reading instruction using the big five, we turn our attention in Chapter 2 toward differentiating and targeting instruction in small groups based on assessment findings to help all students become successful and strategic readers.

Summary

Two solutions have been proposed and are currently in various stages of national implementation to address the twin achievement gaps described in the Introduction to this book. The proposed solution for solving the international achievement gap is the adoption, implementation, and assessment of the English Language Arts (K–12) Common Core Standards, integrated with the past findings about the big five evidence-based elements of reading instruction. The ELACCS have been benchmarked against global college and career readiness standards that will prepare students throughout the United States for competition in a global economy.

Current changes and challenges in reading assessment for classroom teachers and school-based reading specialists are closely related to the hurried and somewhat disorganized adoption and implementation of both the ELACCS and RTI models of reading instruction. In addition to these assessment changes and challenges, we also discussed the what, why, and how of reading assessment, which teachers and reading specialists need to understand to make optimal use of reading assessment in classrooms.

The “what” or content of current reading assessment is motivated by the rapid changes and challenges in reading assessment and instruction associated with the adoption and implementation of the ELACCS. The hurried and patchwork development of assessments has led to widespread concern about how these standards will be assessed. The “why” of reading assessment was discussed in relation to four purposes for which reading is assessed in schools and classrooms: screening, progress-monitoring, diagnostic, and outcomes. As far
as “how” reading is assessed, we described several types of reading assessment approaches, including: formative, summative, norm-referenced, criterion-referenced, and curriculum-based assessments. We then went on to describe characteristics of high-quality reading assessments, which included a discussion of the concepts of assessment reliability and validity.

Finally, we described two reading assessment models, a standards-based model directly connect to assessment of the ELACCS and a components-based reading assessment approach tied to the big five essential elements of evidence-based reading instruction.

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www.pcboe.net/les/elderweb/phoneme%20segmentation/Yopp_Singer_Phoneme_Segmentation_Test.pdf
Ms. Bachio, a first-grade teacher in an inner-city school, just finished administering the DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) subtest to her student, Alfonso. After scoring the NWF, Ms. Bachio determined that Alfonso is pronouncing 10 words correct per minute (wcpm). This places Alfonso well below norms established for a first-grade student at the beginning of the year.

Alfonso is a cheerful, willing student who tries hard to please Ms. Bachio. He is attentive during core reading instruction lessons delivered to the whole class, but he cannot read kindergarten-level core reading program selections without assistance. Also, Alfonso is usually not able to independently use sound/letter blending strategies or skills taught during core reading instruction, nor does he easily pick up on new concepts taught during vocabulary instruction. Ms. Bachio is concerned about her ability to accelerate Alfonso’s reading development. She is faithfully teaching the core reading program lessons and presenting well-planned and explicit strategy, skill, and concept lessons to her class. What more can she do?

Ms. Bachio approached her school reading coach, Ms. George, for assistance. “What can I do to help Alfonso? I just don’t seem to be reaching him with my core reading instruction,” lamented Ms. Bachio.

“Tt was just in a workshop two days ago and I learned about a new way to meet the needs of all students in a classroom,” said Ms. George. “RTI provides a structure for regularly monitoring the progress of your students toward achieving mastery of grade-level Common Core State Standards. I also learned about providing additional support for students, like Alfonso, who struggle, using an RTI approach that uses progress-monitoring data to place them into small groups for intensive instruction targeted to their particular learning needs. After you try out an intervention intended to meet a student’s learning needs for a brief period, their progress is monitored frequently to determine whether the intervention selected met the need and is helping the student to make the desired growth. If not, you select another intervention to try and continue to monitor the effect of the new intervention on the student’s progress. If the student does not respond positively after several attempts to alter the intervention, you can then enlist the help of other specialized teachers, such as the Title I reading specialist or the special education teacher in the school.”

“Sounds interesting! When will we learn more about this?” asked Ms. Bachio.

“We can begin to read and discuss how RTI could be used in our school at our next grade-level study group meeting. What do you think?”
“I think I could use the help,” Ms. Bachio replied. “What can I start reading now to get ready for our discussion?”

“I’ll email you an article they gave us at the workshop,” Ms. George said with a smile.

“Great!” said Ms. Bachio. “Maybe RTI is just the thing I need to help Alfonso accelerate his reading progress and attain grade-level Common Core State Standards mastery,” she thought to herself as she headed back to her classroom.

Successfully differentiating reading instruction is essential if elementary classroom teachers are to help their students succeed in today’s Common Core State Standards learning environment. Response to Intervention (RTI), which has become standard practice in recent years, is a model for differentiating reading instruction in order to meet the needs of struggling readers. In this chapter, we will learn how RTI can be used in reading/literacy instruction to assist all students, especially struggling readers, in making progress toward mastery of grade-level expectations and English Language Arts Common Core Standards (ELACCS) in the elementary school. We will also see how RTI is used to fill in student learning gaps as quickly as possible in order to return students to developmental grade-level literacy instruction.

What Is RTI?

The implementation of RTI models in school districts, aimed at identifying children in need of intervention to ensure their progress in reading and other areas, has proceeded at breakneck speed in the last five years. RTI was initiated by the U.S. Department of Education in response to the over-identification of children, particularly minorities and those living in poverty, as learning disabled and their being placed into special education programs. In order to implement RTI models effectively in classrooms, teachers need to know the answer to several important questions, beginning with: What is RTI?

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an approach for differentiating instruction to meet the learning needs of those students who struggle in their learning and quickly return them to normal developmental instruction (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010; Gilbert et al., 2013; Stahl & McKenna, 2013). RTI is used not only with reading instruction, but with all areas of the curriculum and student behavior. RTI models are typically characterized by four interlocking and interrelated elements:

1. The implementation of a multilevel reading intervention system
2. Universal screening to locate students who are at risk for reading failure
3. A systematic progress-monitoring system
4. A data-based decision making system to guide the delivery of effective, differentiated, and evidence-based reading instruction (see www.rti4success.org)

The implementation of a multilevel reading failure prevention system is typically accomplished in most school reading programs through the use of three distinct and increasingly intensive instructional tiers: primary (Tier 1), secondary (Tier 2), and tertiary (Tier 3). This three-tiered prevention system is designed to act as a safety net to catch students before they fall too far behind the achievement of their peers. At the beginning of each year of instruction, a universal screening assessment is administered to all students to determine whether they are at risk for failing to make adequate progress in meeting established literacy skills, objectives, and standards.

Tier 1 literacy instruction is considered to be the primary level of education and failure prevention in RTI models. This includes instruction using evidence-based literacy instruction
models and/or commercial core reading programs in classroom-based settings (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008; Gilbert et al., 2013). Tier 1 literacy instruction is intended to expose all grade-level students to a high-quality, evidence-based reading curriculum in the general classroom taught by a caring and knowledgeable teacher. Tier 1 instruction is intended to develop all students’ reading abilities and reduce the number of students who develop learning problems. All students in Tier 1 instruction are individually monitored for progress in their literacy growth. Those whose levels of performance or rate of literacy growth lag substantially behind their peers’ are identified to receive Tier 2 literacy instruction (Gilbert et al., 2013). Tier 2 instruction can be offered to remediate a single skill or strategy with which a student may have difficulty, or several.

Tier 2 literacy instruction, considered to be the secondary level of prevention in RTI models, is intended to provide struggling readers with evidence-based reading instruction that is targeted to address a student’s area(s) of greatest need as compared to typically developing students (Gilbert et al., 2013; Stahl & McKenna, 2013). Tier 2 literacy interventions are intended to fill in students’ literacy skill gaps as quickly as possible, so they can return to Tier 1 core literacy instruction only. Tier 2 interventions are typically delivered in small-group settings or one-on-one. Tier 2 literacy instruction does not supplant Tier 1 literacy instruction, but rather extends and supplements it. Students attend their usual core reading instruction program, and then receive additional Tier 2 instruction three or more times per week (30 minutes each time) in the targeted skill area(s). Reading recovery is one example of a proven Tier 2 short-term intervention strategy for first graders in reading and writing (Institute of Educational Sciences, 2013). There are many strategies discussed in this book that, when matched to identified skills, are suitable for providing supplemental Tier 2 instruction.

Weekly progress-monitoring assessment is used to determine the success of Tier 2 supplemental reading instructional interventions with students. If students respond to Tier 2 instruction positively, they are returned to exclusive Tier 1 literacy instruction. If, however, students fail to respond to Tier 2 instruction, meaning that they are failing to make significant progress over time with the instructional strategies being tried, then alternative teaching strategies should be tried. If efforts continue to be unsuccessful, students might be suspected of having an intrinsic literacy problem that keeps them from benefitting from high-quality, generally effective literacy instruction. In such a case, these students may be considered for Tier 3 literacy instruction after diagnostic testing has been conducted.

With Tier 3 literacy instruction, students are provided with even more frequent, intensive instruction (Gilbert et al., 2013; Stahl & McKenna, 2013). Depending on the situation, Tier 3 instruction may be offered in addition to standard Tier 1 instruction or, in the case of pull-out special education interventions, could take the place of Tier 1 instruction. All instructional interventions and modifications are documented and must be offered for a minimum of 8 weeks. If after this time period of Tier 3 instructional interventions and modifications the instruction fails to accelerate or positively impact a student’s literacy learning, this may signal a reading disability that will require the attention of specially trained school personnel, such as a reading specialist or special educator. This three-tiered instructional model is shown in Figure 2.1.

RTI models integrate high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction coupled with frequent use of reliable and valid screening and progress-monitoring assessments. This is done in a systematic way to address students’ instructional needs in a timely and effective manner. Online tools we highly recommend for those just learning about RTI are the training modules offered by the IRIS Center at Vanderbilt University: http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/index.html.

There are several concepts that are central for teachers to understand when implementing RTI models (see Figure 2.2) (McCook, 2007).

One of the key concepts for implementation of RTI models is the systematic and planned use of valid and reliable assessments (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008). Such assessments have undergone extensive evaluation to be certain that the scores obtained actually measure what
they are supposed to measure in stable, consistent, and dependable ways. Another concept central to the use of RTI models is making instructional decisions based on systematically collected assessment data rather than on impressions, hunches, or incidental observations—what some call *kid watching* (Haager, Klinger, & Vaughn, 2007; Stahl & McKenna, 2013).

Evidence-based core literacy instructional programs and practices in Tier 1 literacy instruction are an expected feature of effectively implemented RTI models. Teachers who effectively implement evidence-based, Tier 1 core literacy instructional programs and practices have been shown in multiple studies to endow students with consistent, replicable learning advantages over other interventions (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010; Gilbert et al.,...
2013). To learn which of the many published core or Tier 1 literacy instructional programs have been found effective, we recommend consulting the What Works Clearinghouse website, available through http://ies.ed.gov/.

**How Is RTI Implemented?**

Effectively implementing RTI models relies heavily on understanding and applying the logic of problem-solving models, based on the work of Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2010, pp. 8–11) (Figure 2.3).

This model provides teachers with a step-by-step guide for effectively implementing a problem-solving process to support the use of RTI models in the school or classroom. In the remainder of this chapter, we discuss the effective implementation of an RTI model three-tiered literacy instructional program. We begin with implementing effective Tier 1 literacy instruction.

**FIGURE 2.3 Twelve Steps for Implementing an RTI Model of Reading Instruction**

1. Collect universal screening data early in the year to identify potentially at risk students.
2. Implement evidence- and standards-based core literacy instruction programs and practices in Tier 1 reading instruction.
3. Collect progress-monitoring assessment data on all students at three equally spaced benchmark intervals during the academic year.
4. Identify students who score below established literacy benchmark targets or indicators during the year for Tier 2 instruction.
5. Provide additional evidence-based and targeted literacy instruction in small groups (Tier 2) for identified students scoring below established benchmarks.
6. Frequently monitor student progress in Tier 2 small-group literacy instruction to determine students’ responses to the intervention.
7. For those students who are making progress with Tier 2 supplementary reading instruction, continue until they can be returned to Tier 1 instruction and meet established literacy benchmark targets or indicators.
8. Review Tier 2 small-group literacy instruction for revision or discontinuation based on results of frequent progress monitoring of students.
9. For those students who do not make progress with Tier 2 supplementary reading instruction, move these students into Tier 3 reading instruction.
10. In Tier 3 reading instruction, teachers revise their instruction to increase intensity, duration, or frequency of literacy instruction groups to meet students’ data-based, literacy instructional needs.
11. After making revisions to increase intensity of Tier 3 reading instruction, continue to review student response to the reading instruction or intervention using progress-monitoring assessments on a weekly, if not daily, basis.
12. If after additional revisions to Tier 3 instruction are attempted students show the need, based on progress-monitoring assessments, for even more intensive, additional instructional support, they are recommended for comprehensive literacy diagnostic evaluation to determine eligibility and need for special education, Title I, tutoring, and speech-language or English language learning programs.
Implementing Effective Tier 1 Literacy Instruction

Effective Tier 1 literacy instruction is first and foremost anchored in the findings of scientific research evidence on best practices. Scientific research evidence is derived from studies that report the results of experiments in which one or more instructional interventions are tested against a control or comparison instructional intervention (Stanovich & Stanovich, 2003). Scientific research reports are published in blind peer-reviewed research journals such as *Reading Research Quarterly* and *Journal of Educational Research*. Blind peer review means that the reviewers do not know the identity of the authors submitting the report for potential publication, thus protecting against reviewers selecting studies for publication based on an author’s reputation and not on the quality of the study. For an instructional intervention to be considered evidence based, findings or results from multiple studies must come to the same conclusion about its effectiveness. Findings from a single study or even several studies (less than a dozen or so) are usually deemed insufficient to qualify an instructional intervention as evidence based. Thus, the bar for claiming an instructional practice is evidence based is extremely high, and as a result, classroom teachers would be well-advised to use these practices in their literacy instruction. Teachers can familiarize themselves with evidence-based literacy instructional practices by consulting documents available on the following websites: www.nationalreadingpanel.org, the NELP Report at http://lincs.ed.gov/, and www.reading.org. Next, we discuss essential components of evidence- and standards-based literacy instruction and describe characteristic teacher practices that promote highly effective literacy instructional outcomes when used with students consistently in elementary school classrooms.

Essential Components of Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction

This book presents evidence-based assessment and teaching strategies for your use. We now know that high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction programs and practices focus instruction on the following essential components of effective literacy instruction:

- Oral language development
- Concepts of print
- Letter name knowledge
- Sight word recognition
- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension
- Writing/spelling
- Volume reading and writing
- Motivation

An equally important component of evidence-based reading instruction is student access to appropriately challenging reading and writing using a variety of text types, such as books, poetry, graphic novels, and so on (Neuman, 1999; Neuman & Celano, 2001; Neuman & Celano, 2006). Printed texts and printmaking supplies or materials may include but are not limited to

- A variety of interesting and appropriately challenging reading and writing materials including both good literature and informational books
- Supportive and assistive technologies for learning to read and write
- Sociodramatic, literacy-enriched play in kindergarten
Other Essential Components of Standards-Based Literacy Instruction

Implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is proceeding swiftly and sweeping across the nation (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA Center & CCSSO], 2010). As outlined in Chapter 1, classroom teachers need to become familiar with the English Language Arts (K–12) Common Core Standards (ELACCS) and be able to interpret those standards into effective reading instruction in elementary classrooms (Reutzel, 2013).

The identified instructional targets of the CCSS are found within the grade level–specific ELACCS (K–5) anchor standards for elementary teachers. Within each grade level anchor standard, there is a brief description of what a student at that grade level should be able to do to master the standard. For example, in the grade 2 reading standard for literature—key ideas and details, we read the following:

1. Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text
2. Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral
3. Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges

Each of these three areas of focus within the standard can be rephrased as an individual teaching and learning objective. For example, here is an objective stated based on the standard’s first focus area: Students will be able to ask and answer who, what, where, when, why, and how questions with at least 80% accuracy to demonstrate understanding of key details in text. With this clear objective, teachers will then be able to plan and deliver lessons aimed at improving students’ abilities to meet this standard when reading grade 2 literature texts.

Some of the most important elements of teacher preparation and professional development are gaining necessary knowledge of each of their grade-level CCSS standards; understanding how to restate the standards as measureable teaching/learning objectives; and then planning, designing, and delivering carefully crafted lessons that help students meet the standards.

Ravitch (2010) advocates putting into place a carefully developed, coherent, and rich curriculum to support the teaching of the CCSS as follows:

We should attend to the quality of the curriculum—that is, what is taught. Every school should have a well-conceived, coherent, sequential curriculum. A curriculum is not a script but a set of general guidelines. . . . The curriculum is the starting place for other reforms. (p. 231)

So, the fact of the matter is simply this: Standards are not curriculum! Unfortunately, publishers have yet to develop valid curricula for teaching the CCSS that can be used with any great confidence, and for considerably greater cost, than providing teachers with the support and know-how to develop their own curriculum, objectives, and lessons to teach the ELACCS.

A well-conceived, coherent, sequential CCSS curriculum such as Ravitch (2010) advocates will not only specify what is to be taught but also how and in what sequence skills, strategies, and concepts will be taught, from the simple to the complex. For example, answering questions when developing a curriculum that progresses from reading easy to more complex information texts might ask: What does mastering the skill of “getting the main idea” look like? Understanding the learning progressions needed to support student learning is a matter of critical importance and will likely be most effectively addressed at the local university level in teacher education preparation programs or in district- or school-level professional sessions on developing curriculum to support mastery of the ELACCS.
Other economically developed nations have diligently labored to develop globally competitive standards and curricula that specify what students are supposed to be learning to prepare their students for college and careers. U.S. teachers and teacher educators are playing a game of catch up in comparison to teachers and teacher educators in other developed nations. For example, teachers in Japan are allowed to invest a great deal of time during the normal school day in collaborative planning with other teachers to prepare well-constructed, tried-and-true lessons that address national and international learning standards, like those necessary to master the ELACSS, and arrange those lessons in a sequence to support the learning progressions from simple to complex. The process Japanese teachers use is called lesson study (Durbin, 2010).

In lesson study, teachers identify a standard to be taught, restate this standard as a measurable objective, and collaboratively write out a lesson plan to address the teaching of that standard with a set of increasingly difficult and complex texts. After writing the lesson out and preparing the necessary materials to teach the lesson, one of the teachers teaches the lesson to a group of students in a classroom and the other teachers observe the lesson carefully to determine ways the lesson can be revised to provide optimally effective instruction. After observing the lesson, the teachers meet again as a group to revise the lesson and then make it available to all of the teachers at grade level to use in their classrooms. In this way, Japanese teachers become experts at crafting objectives, curriculum, and lessons that are standards based and classroom tested. One of the authors of this book and a group of three collaborating second-grade teachers developed a lesson using lesson study to address the following second grade ELACCS writing standard:

Write opinion pieces in which [students] introduce the topic or book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply reasons that support the opinion, use linking words (e.g., because, and, also) to connect opinion and reasons, and provide a concluding statement or section.

This author went into one of the second-grade teacher’s classrooms to teach the lesson while the teachers observed. After the lesson was taught, the teacher observers and the author suggested revisions to the lesson. The resultant lesson plan is found in Figure 2.4. A checklist for writing opinions is found in Figure 2.5 (p. 36), along with the mentor text “Pizza, Pizza, Pizza,” and the group composition that resulted from the teaching of the lesson in Figure 2.4.

Teacher-developed and -validated lessons resulting from the lesson studies of teachers in Japan are accorded such high value that national bookstores routinely stock and sell these lessons to other teachers and the public. Think about how lesson study could be used to build the capacity of all U.S. teachers to design effective, evidence- and standards-based reading lessons and curricula. For more information about lesson study, we have found the “Tools for Conducting Lesson Study” page at www.tc.columbia.edu to contain valuable information.

The lessons resulting from the process of lesson study are validated in the context of the classroom and have been demonstrated to be effective. They are to educators what treatment protocols are to medical practitioners. No serious effort to reform medical practice would leave to chance something as valuable and effective as treatment protocols. Yet, in U.S. educational reform efforts such as ELACSS implementation, effective, clinically validated lessons that routinely and effectively employ evidence-based practices that help students master established standards are habitually overlooked by policy makers and are not yet available from commercial publishers.

**Leading and Managing a Classroom Effectively**

It is critical that teachers feel competent and confident in orchestrating a classroom. Here we think of classrooms having flexible but orderly routines that support students’ increasing independence as learners. When teachers are able to manage a classroom where more than one thing at a time takes place, then students’ opportunities to learn in appropriate ways and at appropriate levels are substantially increased (Pianta, LaParo, & Hamre, 2007;
This allows the teacher time to work with small groups and individuals so that student work is targeted to meet varied learning needs.

There is a strong relationship between a teacher’s confidence in managing the classroom and his or her capacity to teach intellectually rich content. McNeil (2000) explains that teachers who value tight control in the classroom and favor orderly classrooms often create and deliver lower level and routinized curricula. The goal is to offer learning tasks that encourage student discussion, use of varied materials, and higher-level thinking. It appears from past research that successful teachers approach classroom management as creating positive and effective learning environments. These classrooms embody such attributes as acceptance, trust, relationships, respect, flexibility, and student self-determination instead of an overemphasis on teacher authority (Agne, Greenwood, & Miller, 1994; Brophy, 1998; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2013).

**Grouping Students Flexibly**

Effective teachers make use of multiple grouping formats to meet students’ needs. The exclusive use of whole-group literacy instruction is, frankly, not effective in promoting students’ literacy growth. On the other hand, too much small-group instruction sometimes results in students spending large amounts of time in independent seatwork or in centers engaged in relatively low-level literacy learning activities with little or no accountability. Exemplary classroom teachers seek a balance between using both whole-class and small-group instruction when offering Tier 1 reading instruction (Taylor, 2008). In short, if all students need to learn a particular concept, skill, or strategy, then whole-group instruction makes sense for at least introducing this information. Small-group instruction, on the other hand, is a valuable opportunity for teachers to offer students more individualized instruction and coaching.

Because literacy instruction and learning are social as well as cognitive endeavors, whole-class instruction is more effective when teachers and students engage in a classroom community of socially shared literacy activities, demonstrations, lessons, and discussions. Shared literacy learning activities, generally provided in whole-class instruction settings, ought to be a regular and integral part of daily literacy instruction (Cunningham, Hall, & Defee, 1998; Flood, Lapp, Flood, & Nagel, 1992; Wilkinson & Townsend, 2000). A few examples of whole-class shared literacy learning activities include telling stories; teacher demonstrations of strategy use and gradual release of these skills to students; dramatizing stories; reading books aloud; discussing books; sharing student-authored stories, poems, and songs; reading enlarged texts of stories, songs, poems, raps, and jingles; and participating in experiments or other active learning experiences.

Small, differentiated literacy instruction groups vary in size from two to eight, depending on the number of students with similar instructional needs. Group membership is never fixed and varies according to students’ responses to the instruction offered to them in Tier 1 literacy instruction. Optiz (1998) describes flexible grouping as a way to allow “students to work in differently mixed ability groups depending upon the learning task at hand” (p. 10). As teachers work with students in small literacy groups in Tier 1 instruction, they provide targeted, explicit lessons and teacher-monitored guided practice. This helps students understand and use strategies they have already been taught in a whole-class setting and with a little additional guidance and practice. Students working in small Tier 1 groups practice these already taught skills, strategies, and concepts in appropriately challenging text levels.

To achieve greater differentiation within these small Tier 1 groups, teachers emphasize literacy learning objectives tailored to each group’s needs that are part of the grade-level, core literacy program. Teachers often engage each group in different learning routines, objectives, tasks, and activities. For example, one small group of learners might focus on activities and tasks that help them fluently recognize high-frequency sight words, while another small instruction group might be focused on a lesson in which students write a summary of
Today, boys and girls, we will be learning how to find three major parts of a well-written opinion using a checklist. Everybody has their own opinions about different things. Because everybody has opinions, they need to be able to express their opinions clearly and well. Opinions can be expressed in both speaking and writing.

### Checklist for three major parts of a well-written opinion

- **Topic**: A statement of an opinion. An opinion is what you think about something.
- **Statement of an opinion**: Opinions are statements that express a personal way of thinking that others may not agree with. The second criterion in the checklist is the statement of an opinion. The reasons are the third criterion for a well-written opinion.
- **Reasons**: The third criterion in the checklist is at least three reasons to support an opinion. We will be using this checklist to do some close readings of sample written opinions.

Close readings are when a reader reads a text, looking carefully to see if the author uses the criteria for a well-written text. When we close read an opinion, we will look specifically to see if the author has used the three major criteria for a well-written opinion: topic, statement of an opinion, and at least three supporting reasons, as we have in our checklist.

Here is an opinion text titled, “Pizza, Pizza, Pizza!” I am going to model a close reading of this opinion text by thinking aloud and using our opinion writing checklist. I begin by reading the title.

Then I look at my checklist and ask myself, does the author state a topic? I think to myself, yes! The author states the topic: pizza! So, I put a checkmark in the first circle on the opinion writing checklist. Then I write the topic on the line: pizza.

As I read this next part, I noticed that the author states an opinion by saying “Pizza is the best food in the world!” So, I put a checkmark in the second circle on the opinion writing checklist. Then I write the statement of opinion on the line: “Pizza is the best food in the world!”

Now, I continue reading the Pizza opinion looking for the last criteria in the opinion writing checklist: three supporting reasons for the opinion. (Read Pizza to the end.) Now, I ask myself, does the author state three supporting reasons for the opinion? So I reread the last part to see if there are at least three reasons for the opinion. I notice that three reasons are included: The three reasons are: 1) it comes in so many flavors; 2) you can put it whatever you want; 3) it is good anytime, hot or cold.

So, I put a checkmark in the third circle on the opinion writing checklist. Then I write the three reasons on the three numbered lines on the checklist.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Lesson Sequence</th>
<th>Expected Student Response</th>
<th>Materials Needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guided Practice</td>
<td>Now let’s practice a close reading of another opinion text together. Here is another opinion text titled, “Avengers: The Movie!” I am going to model a close reading of this opinion text by thinking aloud and using our opinion writing checklist. I will ask you to help me as I go along. Let’s read the title together. Next, we look at the checklist and ask, does the author state a topic? I think to myself, yes! The author states the topic of Avengers: The Movie. So, I put a checkmark in the first circle on the opinion writing checklist. (Put a checkmark in the circle). [Student name], can you please write the topic on the first line on the opinion writing checklist? Next, I will continue reading the “Avengers: The Movie!” opinion to see if the author states an opinion, or what they think or feel about the topic. (Read more of the opinion text.) As I read this next part, I noticed that the author states an opinion by saying “Avengers is the coolest movie ever!” So, I put a checkmark in the second circle on the opinion writing checklist. (Put a checkmark in the second circle). Then I write the statement of opinion on the line: “Avengers is the coolest movie ever!” I continue reading the “Avengers: The Movie!” opinion looking for the last criteria in the opinion writing checklist: three supporting reasons for the opinion. (Read “Avengers” to the end.) Now, I ask myself, does the author state three supporting reasons for the opinion? So I reread the last part to see if there are at least three reasons for the opinion. I notice that three reasons are included. The three reasons are: (1) All the best superheroes are in it; (2) The Hulk does a smack down on Loki; (3) Iron Man saves the world by flying an atom bomb into space where it explodes. So, I put a checkmark in the third circle on the opinion writing checklist. (Put a checkmark in the third circle). Then I write the three reasons on the three numbered lines on the checklist. Continue guided practice over several days using at least two opinion model texts per day, gradually releasing to the students the steps of close reading of an opinion text with the whole and smaller groups. Move this process into small groups. Work together for several more days before asking individual students to do it on their own. Independent Practice</td>
<td>Now, you will do this by yourself. Assessment</td>
<td>Show me how you would close read an opinion text by telling me what criteria you are looking for during your close read. Next, tell me how well the author meets the criteria you are using during your close read.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Give individuals opinion texts and checklists to use. Assessment</td>
<td>Give students an opinion text and ask them tell you the criteria for a well-written opinion and how well this text matches those criteria.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a text to demonstrate comprehension. We point out these features of differentiation because in many schools teachers form small groups for “guided reading instruction” in which the only difference is the level of text used in the group. The objectives, formats, routines, and activities in many guided reading groups are the same—introduce the book, take a picture walk, read the book, retell, revisit the text, and so forth. Guiding reading instruction has its place in a balanced curriculum, but other small-group learning activities are also needed. Differentiation goes deeper into altering the content, process, product, and motivation associated with Tier 1, small-group, core program–related literacy instruction.

Establishing Classroom Routines

Children develop a sense of security when the events of the school day revolve around a predictable sequence of literacy learning events and activities. Students find comfort in familiar instructional routines and daily classroom schedules in a well-organized and managed classroom (Morrow, Reutzel, & Casey, 2006). There are any number of ways to organize activities and instruction for Tier 1 literacy instruction. However, one of the most critical considerations for the teacher is time allocation and scheduling.

There seems to be a fairly wide range as to the duration of literacy instruction in elementary school classrooms, but many schools require 120 to 180 minutes of instruction each day in reading and writing. Shanahan (2004) also recommends the allocation of at least 120 minutes per day for Tier 1 literacy instruction. As shown in Figure 2.6, this total time allocation of 120 minutes of Tier 1 literacy instruction is further subdivided into four 30-minute literacy instructional blocks focused on the essential elements of evidence-based literacy instruction: word work, fluency, writing, and comprehension strategies.

The purpose of the 30-minute word work instructional block is to develop students’ phonological and phonemic awareness, concepts about print, letter name knowledge, decoding and word recognition, and spelling concepts, skills, and strategies. During these 30 minutes, the effective literacy teacher provides the whole class with explicit instruction on each of

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**FIGURE 2.5** Opinion Writing Checklist

Name_____________________________

- Does the author state the topic? What is the topic? Write it here:

- Does the author state his/her opinion? What is the opinion? Write it here:

- Does the author state at least three reasons for the opinion? What are the reasons? Write them here:
  1. ____________________________________________
  2. ____________________________________________
  3. ____________________________________________

**Close Read Mentor Opinion Writing Text**

*Pizza! Pizza! Pizza!*

I think pizza is the best food in the world because it comes in so many flavors! Also, you can put whatever you want on it. Finally, it tastes good anytime, hot or cold.

**Resulting Group Composition by 2nd Graders**

Avengers: The Movie!

Avengers is the coolest movie ever! It is so cool because all the best superheroes are in it. The Hulk does a smackdown on Loki. At the end, Iron Man saves the world by flying a bomb into space where it explodes.
these word-related skills, strategies, and concepts. Students receive clear verbal explanations, or “think alouds,” coupled with expert modeling of reading and writing concepts, skills, and strategies. Having clearly modeled reading and writing word work concepts, skills, and strategies, teachers then provide students with guided or supervised practice.

The purpose of the daily 30-minute fluency instructional block is twofold. First, students are given brief, explicit lessons that help them understand the elements of fluent reading: accuracy, rate, and expression. Students also see and hear the teacher model the elements of fluent reading. Modeling is followed with the teacher involving students in reading practice to develop fluency. Effective Tier 1 literacy teachers use various formats for reading fluency practice, such as choral reading, including such variations as echoic (echo chamber), unison (all together), antiphonal (one group of students reading against another), mumble reading (whisper), a line per child, and so on. For those who are unfamiliar with these choral reading variations, we recommend Opitz and Rasinski’s (2008) Good-Bye Round Robin or Rasinski’s (2010) The Fluent Reader. Students can also read in pairs, with same-age peers or older peers from higher grade level classrooms. Each pair alternates the roles of reader and listener. After each oral reading, the listener provides feedback. Students can also prepare oral reading performances, for which effective Tier 1 literacy teachers can select one of three well-known oral reading performance approaches: readers’ theater, radio reading, or recitation.

The purpose of the writing instructional block in Tier 1 literacy instruction is to develop students’ composition skills, spelling, writing mechanics, and grammatical understandings. Effective instructional practices used within this time allocation include modeled writing by the teacher; a writer’s workshop including drafting, conferencing, revising, editing, publishing, and disseminating; and direct, explicit, whole-class instruction on each of these writing skills, strategies, and concepts. We also strongly recommend that daily lessons provide a time allocation for sharing children’s writing in an “author’s chair” or some other method.

The purpose of the comprehension strategies 30-minute instructional block is to develop students’ vocabulary and comprehension strategies. Effective instructional practices used within this time segment include explicit instruction on vocabulary concepts using a variety of methods and requiring a variety of responses, such as word play and word awareness (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002; Johnson, 2001; McKenna, 2002). As for comprehension instruction, effective Tier 1 literacy teachers focus attention on explicitly teaching evidence-based reading comprehension strategies, including question answering, question asking, story and text structure, graphic organizers, monitoring, summarizing, and activating/building background knowledge. At some point in time, effective Tier 1 literacy teachers teach students to use a set or family of multiple comprehension strategies such as reciprocal teaching (Palincsar, 2003), concept-oriented reading instruction (Guthrie, 2003; Swan, 2003), and
transactional strategies (Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, & Schuder, 1996) to be used strategically while interacting with a variety of texts over long periods of time (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Reutzel, Smith, & Fawson, 2005).

**Systematic Instruction**

Systematic instruction means that classroom teachers teach each grade level’s identified scope or range of literacy concepts, skills, and strategies using a school’s or district’s adopted reading curriculum or, for many new teachers, the school’s adopted core reading program. Systematic instruction also means that teachers teach this planned range of reading concepts, skills, and strategies in a predetermined sequence or order as spelled out in the core reading program or district-adopted reading curriculum. The range and order of literacy concepts, skills, or strategies to be taught in core reading instruction are typically found in the scope and sequence chart usually located in each grade-level core reading program’s teachers’ manual or edition or in a similar chart in a school- or district-adopted reading curriculum. It is important to note that systematic does not mean that teachers pace the instruction of information as prescribed in many core reading program teachers’ editions or district/school curriculum guides. For teachers to provide appropriate instructional pacing requires them to observe student responses to the current pace of instruction and then make needed adjustments.

**Explicit Instruction**

Explicit instruction is described as instruction in which teachers state clear, concise, and measurable instructional objectives to be taught. It also implies a carefully structured approach to introduce new knowledge and show multiple examples of the new knowledge in action, ample practice of the skill by the learners, and a final demonstration of their mastery of the new knowledge. This model for explicit instruction is what is often termed gradual release of responsibility.

A clear, concise, and measurable instructional objective describes a specific literacy concept, skill, or strategy to be taught along with the cognitive thinking processes needed, the assigned tasks to be completed, and the level of acceptable performance. An example might be: Students will learn to blend letter sounds in consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words containing a short /a/ vowel sound to pronounce at least 20 words per minute with 95% accuracy. Next, teachers provide students with explanations about why it is important to learn the identified literacy concept, skill, or strategy, as well as when and where it will be useful in literacy (Duffy, 2009). Next comes teacher modeling and thinking aloud about how to consciously perform the thinking process steps needed to effectively use a literacy strategy independently (Duffy, 2009; Hancock, 1999). After modeling, the teacher “scaffolds” or closely guides and coaches students’ use of the concept or strategy with a gradual release of responsibility for using the associated thinking processes during subsequent lessons over many days, weeks, or months (see Figure 2.7) (Duffy, 2009; Hancock, 1999; Raphael, George, Weber, & Nies, 2009).

We repeat with emphasis, Tier 1 literacy instruction provides all students with increased, targeted, intense instruction and practice to meet individual literacy learning needs. For some students, Tier 1 literacy instruction offers much needed time for double doses (or more) of teacher-directed explicit instruction and guided practice to learn a previously taught but not yet mastered literacy skill, concept, or strategy. For other students, Tier 1 literacy instruction offers students the opportunity to extend and accelerate the acquisition of advanced literacy skills, strategies, and concepts in literature circle groups or book club discussions beyond those typically taught at grade level.
Tier 1 literacy instruction is not intended to address all individual or specific literacy learning needs, but rather to provide all students grade-level developmental evidence-based literacy instruction. High-quality Tier 1 literacy instruction is systematically and explicitly taught to the whole class of students and in small groups using either a commercially published or locally developed literacy instructional program. Evidence-based Tier 1 literacy instruction requires that teachers allocate at least 120 minutes for daily instruction. As previously noted, this allocated instructional time is often distributed across four essential components of effective literacy instruction: word work, fluency work, comprehension strategy instruction, and writing. Shanahan (2004) has reported increased student achievement when high-quality, evidence-based Tier 1 literacy instruction is provided to all students, as described here.

Implementing Effective Tier 2 Literacy Instruction: Triage in Classrooms

The concept of triage in medicine is well known in medical circles, but is not as familiar in educational settings. Triage in medicine is the process of determining the patient’s needs and the priority of medical treatment options based on the severity of the condition. Similarly, in RTI models, Tier 2 literacy instruction is a bit like educational triage in elementary classrooms. When children are placed into Tier 2 literacy instruction, their instruction is targeted to known gaps or weaknesses in their current literacy performance as determined in Tier 1 instruction and assessment. During an initial period of time, usually about 8 weeks, teachers match evidence-based literacy instruction to the area of a student’s greatest need. They frequently monitor the effectiveness of the instruction, modify instruction where necessary, and finally determine other teaching options if the student does not respond to the instruction provided.
According to the RTI Network (2009) and others, Tier 2 literacy instruction is intended to assist students not making adequate progress in the regular classroom in Tier 1 literacy instruction. Tier 2 literacy instruction is typically taught by the classroom teacher, although other educators and service providers, such as reading specialists, tutors, or aides, can be asked to assist. Nevertheless, the responsibility for designing, documenting, and coordinating effective Tier 2 literacy instruction rests with the classroom teacher. Struggling students are provided more targeted and intensive reading instruction in small-group settings matched to their needs on the basis of levels of performance and rates of progress (Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Tyner, 2009; Wilkinson & Townsend, 2000; Wonder-McDowell, Reutzel, & Smith, 2011). Depending on the severity of learning issues, students who continue to struggle after receiving Tier 2 literacy instruction may be considered for more intensive Tier 3 interventions.

Another concept central to the success of Tier 2 literacy instruction is “curricular alignment.” Teacher-directed Tier 2 literacy instruction must make sure that students receive instruction aligned with the scope and sequence used in Tier 1 core classroom literacy instruction, especially when someone other than the classroom teacher is working with students (Allington, 1994; Davis & Wilson, 1999). Alignment of Tier 1 and Tier 2 literacy instructional programs has been shown to significantly and positively affect literacy growth among at-risk students (Wonder-McDowell, Reutzel, & Smith, 2011). Because the classroom teacher typically provides both Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction, problems of curricular alignment are usually avoided.

**Small-Group Tier 2 Reading Instruction**

Small-group Tier 2 literacy instructional planning begins with student screening and progress-monitoring assessments. If a previous year’s assessment data are available, teachers should study these data in addition to those universal screening data obtained in the early fall, in order to determine the degree of summer literacy loss (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). Small-group Tier 2 reading instruction should not proceed without conducting a universal screening assessment of all students within the first week or two of a new school year.

From their review of student assessment data, teachers can begin to see which students are potentially at risk for literacy problems early in the year. The teacher should then place these potentially at-risk students on their watch list during the first few weeks of literacy instruction. When the past year’s and the current year’s data are taken in combination, teachers can then determine which students need to be monitored more closely.

The next step is to observe and monitor the progress of these potentially at-risk students’ performance in Tier 1 reading instruction for 6 to 8 weeks before making a decision about providing additional Tier 2 literacy instruction. If these or other students are not making progress in Tier 1 literacy instruction similar to their peers, they should be further assessed to determine areas of greatest literacy need using a component-based reading assessment model such as those discussed in Chapter 1 and in later chapters of this book. Once a student’s area of greatest literacy instruction need is clearly identified, these students can be placed into Tier 2 small-group instruction where they receive targeted, intensive instruction intended to fill their literacy learning need. Figure 2.8 depicts an iterative process teachers might employ when creating and managing RTI Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction groups.

Once Tier 2 small literacy instruction groups have been established, teachers need to turn their attention to preparing all students in the classroom to function successfully in the multiple literacy activities in the daily classroom schedule. The first few weeks of school are an ideal time to train students in classroom management, including the many activities and expected procedures for transitioning between instructional group settings during periods of small-group and independent literacy learning activities.
Managing a Classroom When Implementing Tier 2 Instruction

Teachers must plan productive work for those students who are not participating in Tier 2 small-group literacy instruction and who are not under the direct supervision of the classroom teacher. Teachers often ask us what they should do with the other children who are not in their Tier 2 groups. Many elementary classroom teachers use learning centers, stations, or independent work activities. When planning such formats to support or accompany Tier 2 small-group literacy instruction, there are several important decisions to be made.

Teachers need to consider how many learning centers they can reasonably manage while simultaneously providing a small group of students with Tier 2 supplemental literacy instruction. For an inexperienced teacher, managing the complexities of multiple literacy learning centers may seem too much. Literacy learning centers are not the only effective way to give students meaningful practice in reading and writing. Pairing students with peers or buddies can provide them with effective reading practice when not participating in small-group literacy instruction. Involving other educators in Tier 2 classroom literacy instruction—such as reading recovery teachers with differentiated assignments, aides, tutors, or reading specialists—can provide additional personnel and supervision for other small groups in a classroom.

For more experienced teachers, the question is not whether to use literacy learning centers or stations but rather how to design effective centers that promote literacy learning. Unsupervised literacy learning centers are established primarily to give students independent
or peer-assisted practice in applying literacy concepts, skills, or strategies previously taught by the classroom teacher. Therefore, if an educator is not supervising centers, then the activities and tasks to be completed independently should never represent new or novel learning experiences.

Several key features are associated with effectively designed literacy learning centers. Literacy learning centers should provide students with practice in the essential components of evidence-based reading instruction—fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and word recognition. Literacy learning centers that focus on low-level completion of seatwork activities or participation in easy, repetitious games to keep students occupied are not the most effective use of classroom or practice time. Students need well-defined and structured assignments requiring them to demonstrate task completion.

Procedures for using literacy learning centers need to be explicitly taught, modeled, and practiced under the guidance of the teacher prior to allowing students to engage in the independent use of literacy learning centers. Likewise, procedures for transitioning among a variety of literacy learning centers should be explicitly taught, modeled, and practiced to reduce transition times. Teachers who design effective literacy learning centers clearly display the literacy learning objectives, standards, or benchmarks, as well as the rules or behavior expected in literacy learning centers and the directions for completing assignments, tasks, or work in the centers.

Teaching Students to Effectively Use Literacy Centers During Tier 2 Instruction

Reutzel and Morrow (2007) have developed a six-week procedural training process for successfully engaging students in independent or guided practice activities found in classroom literacy learning centers. At the beginning of the school year, literacy learning centers should be ready to be used by the students, but teachers should not be tempted to let students use them right away. Allowing students to enter and use a variety of literacy centers or stations and the accompanying print/literacy tools at the very beginning of the school year without adequate procedural training is an invitation for a classroom management disaster. Cordon off the literacy learning centers for five to six weeks. This creates some suspense and increases students’ interest in getting into the centers. During this time, students will be trained to successfully enter, move among, and engage in tasks found in the centers. A daily schedule of literacy routines and a literacy learning center rotation chart need to be posted in the classroom and reviewed each day (see Figure 2.9).

During the first week of the school year, ignore the literacy centers around the room. Focus attention on whole-group instruction. Spend small amounts of time collecting informal assessment data on children’s behavioral abilities to follow directions, listen, and remain on task and focused in whole-group settings. Administer literacy screening tests to all students in the classroom during this first week, if possible. Finally, spend a bit of time learning about students’ general interests, attitudes, and motivations and those specific to reading and writing.

By the second week, tell students that in a few weeks they will be working more often in small groups and in the literacy learning centers set up around the classroom. But before they can do so, there is much they need to learn. Doing this heightens students’ curiosity and motivation to learn literacy learning center expectations and procedures. Also, during the second week, explain in 2 minutes or less what each literacy space of the classroom is for, such as paired reading, word work, and writing centers. Take about 5 minutes each day to explain one or two literacy learning centers until all have been described.

In the third week, select one or two centers to more fully explain and model how students are to enter, use, clean up, and rotate or move to other small-group and literacy learning
centers in the classroom. On the first day of the third week, model how students should move from their seats to the selected centers in the classroom. On the second day of the third week, explain that a team leader will be appointed to lead his or her group in a quiet oral reading of the posted rules and directions for working in the literacy center.

On the third day of the third week, the teacher models how and where students are to seat themselves in the selected literacy centers and how, once seated, students should wait for the team leader to distribute materials necessary for completing the displayed task in each center. On this same day, the teacher discusses expectations for completing assigned literacy center tasks. On the fourth day, the teacher explicitly explains the consequences for failure to follow center directions and obey the rules, directing attention to posted consequences displayed in each literacy center. On the last day of the third week, the teacher models the literacy center cleanup process.

This training will likely require approximately 10 minutes per day for the entire third week of the school year. This training process is repeated at a slightly accelerated pace over the next 2 weeks within each of the remaining classroom literacy centers or stations. During the final week of training, teachers form small groups with assigned team leaders to role-play movement to, use of, and cleanup of literacy centers. The wise teacher realizes that students must be able to role-play and practice these procedures to fully internalize them. During role-play, anyone who fails to follow directions precisely causes the entire group to stop and repractice the expected procedures. Remaining firm about meeting expectations as students role-play their use of literacy centers will save many potential management problems later.
Making Efficient Transitions among Literacy Centers

Training students to make efficient movements between literacy centers and into and out of various classroom activities is essential for minimizing transition times and maximizing literacy practice and instructional time. Experience has taught us the value of using timers or stopwatches to motivate students to accomplish transitions briskly and without dallying. A worthwhile goal is to reduce transition times to a single minute. We recommend a quick four-step process to make this happen, as shown in Figure 2.10. An excellent resource for more information about designing and implementing effective literacy centers is found in Morrow’s *The Literacy Center: Contexts for Reading and Writing* (2002).

![FIGURE 2.10](image)

Implementing Effective Tier 3 Literacy Instruction

As classroom teachers continue to monitor students’ progress and responses to Tier 2 small-group literacy instruction, they systematically determine whether students are responding to the instruction offered. This determination will lead to one of four possible decisions or outcomes:

- **Option 1:** Tier 2 instruction has met the student’s greatest literacy learning needs and he or she can be returned to Tier 1 literacy instruction without the need for continued Tier 2 support.
- **Option 2:** Tier 2 literacy instruction is working well, but the student has not yet closed the gap between the current level and where the student needs to be in order to be returned to Tier 1 instruction without Tier 2 support. As a consequence, the student continues in Tier 2 support for a time and then he or she is returned to Tier 1 core literacy instruction.
- **Option 3:** If, after at least 8 weeks of Tier 2 literacy support focused on the at-risk student’s areas of greatest literacy learning need, the student is not making progress according to ongoing progress-monitoring assessments, then a conference should be held with other consulting teachers to choose alternative approaches to meet the student’s needs. These new interventions should be tried for at least another 8 weeks, accompanied by ongoing progress-monitoring assessment. After these interventions have been tried, another conference is scheduled by the classroom teacher with other consulting teachers to discuss the student’s progress and possible next steps. For those students having persistent reading difficulties, there is a fourth option.
- **Option 4:** For students not making adequate progress after at least 16 weeks of documented Tier 2 support, a conference should be scheduled to discuss possible educational
options. The conference is typically attended by the classroom teacher (required), other consulting teachers (e.g., Title 1 reading specialist, reading recovery teacher, the school intervention teacher), a special education teacher, the principal, and a certified diagnostician. The purpose of the meeting is to examine records assembled by the classroom teacher detailing Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction provided to the student. From this discussion there are several possible outcomes. First, alternative literacy instruction strategies, or possibly research-proven commercial programs, may be suggested for further Tier 2 instruction targeted to the student’s learning needs. If this is the case, the intervention will be put in place along with continuous progress-monitoring assessments for at least 8 weeks, followed by another conference to determine effects.

A second possibility is that the student may be considered for Tier 3 literacy instruction in which he or she receives even more intense literacy instructional support. Tier 3 literacy instruction and ongoing assessment is usually provided by the classroom teacher and/or other specialized educational providers such as reading specialists, Title I teachers, or special education teachers as consultants (McCook, 2007). For students to be formally placed into a special education classroom, a licensed diagnostician must first conduct a full assessment and the results must confirm a learning disability. It is estimated that only 1% to 5% of children will require special education assistance. Students who are not responsive to Tier 2 classroom literacy instruction require additional diagnostic assessment and often more specific and intensive literacy interventions. Tier 3 literacy instruction and assessment is provided by the classroom teacher and/or other specialized educational providers such as reading specialists, Title I teachers, or special education teachers as consultants (McCook, 2007).

The intensity of interventions can be increased in one of three ways in Tier 3 interventions. First, the size of the group for the Tier 3 literacy instruction can be reduced. Supplemental Tier 3 instruction should be offered in smaller groups (1:2 or 1:3) or individually, in addition to core literacy instruction. Second, the frequency of the Tier 3 instruction can be increased from say, three times a week to daily instruction. Third, the duration of the instruction in Tier 3 can be increased from, say, 20 minutes to 40 minutes. Finally, the length of the Tier 3 reading intervention time period can be extended from a low of 8 weeks to 24 weeks (Vaughn, Denton, & Fletcher, 2010).

We recommend that Tier 3 literacy instruction occur at a minimum of five 30-minute sessions per week, or longer if possible. Progress-monitoring assessment on targeted literacy skills should occur as often as twice a week or, at a minimum, weekly, to ensure adequate progress and learning are occurring (McCook, 2007).

As previously noted, in the rare cases where Tier 3 supplemental instruction is not successful, the student may then be referred for further diagnostic testing to determine whether he or she may qualify for special education services, as illustrated previously in Figure 2.1, which shows a model for three-tier RTI instruction along with a fourth step, consideration for special education evaluation and services.

Special educators are becoming more and more informed about how to use RTI procedures in making eligibility decisions for students requiring special education services. For those special educators seeking more information about how to use RTI processes to provide effective Tier 3 assessment and instructional services, we recommend Response to Intervention: Principles and Strategies for Effective Practice (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010).

“Outsourcing” Is Out

In the past, when students failed to make adequate progress in reading and writing they were often referred for out-of-the-classroom special services. This “outsourcing” of teaching interventions was due to federal regulations regarding how struggling students were to have
access to such special programs as Title I and special education under Public Law 94–142—
Education of All Handicapped Children Act. These regulations tended to lead to special
service providers working outside of the regular classroom instead of as team members with
the classroom teacher.

Today, many teachers are working harder than ever to differentiate literacy instruction
in their classrooms. They are now able to work with other educators as a team to offer the
best learning experiences possible within the context of the regular classroom. School leaders
and policy makers have positively viewed shifts in practice associated with the use of RTI
models. This is so much the case that the use of RTI models has been made part of the law in
the reauthorization of two federal educational programs: No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and
the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In so doing, educational leaders and
policy makers at the federal level have set up an expectation that RTI methods will become
a common feature of literacy instruction and assessment in today’s classrooms. However, at
this juncture, RTI is still not a federal mandate for the states, but that day is coming.

Summary

Response to Intervention (RTI) is not a program, but rather a systematic way of viewing
multitiered literacy instruction and intervention in the regular classroom. Shanahan (2008)
summarizes three generally agreed-on elements of RTI models that classroom teachers
should know. First, the classroom teacher bears the major responsibility for providing a high-
quality and differentiated program of core literacy instruction in Tier 1. Second, the middle
tier, Tier 2, describes targeted instruction that is or should be provided by the classroom
teacher or other team members in addition to the core literacy program. Third, as students
with learning difficulties progress from tier to tier, they should receive further assessment and
supplemental literacy instruction with increasing intensity in Tier 3.

RTI is firmly rooted in the collection and analysis of student data to make decisions
about how to plan the most effective literacy instruction that meets individual students’
learning needs. A key to success in using RTI models is a team approach involving commit-
ted educators who work together to address the literacy learning needs of each and every
student. In conclusion, the use of RTI models provides all students, but especially strug-
gling students, with rich, differentiated, grade-level literacy instruction and a varied menu of
literacy assessments, interventions, and instructional providers.

REFERENCES


CHAPTER 2 / Response to Intervention (RTI) 47


